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AUTHOR Lamott, Stephen
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ABSTRACT

There has always been a traditional bias in the learning materials used in schools. Due to a growing awareness of this bias, educators have become sensitive to the need for change in curricular materials. The trend in textbook publication has been to pretend that discrimination no longer exists in the United States. The extensive textbook portrayal of minority individuals in non-traditional roles seemingly supports arguments that minorities as a whole are enjoying greater prosperity and happiness than ever before. Publishers must please educators from a few powerful states that use adoption procedures of textbook assignment and constitute a large share of the marketplace. Deviation from states' wishes is financially unsound for publishers, therefore, textbook writers must conform to standards imposed upon them by others. Although small publishers sometimes risk producing textbooks that place quality over salability, their impact is limited by meager funds for sales campaigns and state regulations governing educator contact with authors. Economics books lack material about black and Hispanic unemployment and the issue of illegal immigration. Most social studies texts do not discuss the realities of poverty and racism. Ethnic conflict is being ignored in U.S. history books, tearing students between textbook ideals and the real-life existence of discrimination. These problems might be solved with the establishment of a national mediation board that would delineate the qualities of good textbooks, determine acceptable subjects for publication, and unite educators, writers, and adoption committees to agree on the most usable, profitable, and acceptable curricular materials. (GEA)

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BIAS IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULA

Stephen Lamott
Education 173
Dr Peters
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There has always been a traditional bias in the learning materials used in the schools. Due to a growing awareness of this bias, educators have become sensitive to to the need for further change in curricular materials. This paper proposes to look at some of these changes.

For the purposes of this paper, **learning materials** will mean those hardcover texts, printed paperbacks, audio-visual materials and other published items used by teachers in classroom situations. **Educators** will mean administrators, teachers and other curriculum specialists who select materials that students will use in school. **Bias** will mean negative stereotypical depiction or exclusion of certain groups of people due to their differences in ethnicity, gender, physical ability or in other factors which separate them from traditional models of mainstream American models.

What has emerged in the last twenty years in textbooks is a move toward pretending that discrimination does not exist in this country. Many materials portray blacks, women and handicapped individuals in non-traditional roles. Some books go so far as to not show white males working in offices anymore. suggesting a new inverse bias (C. Muther, "What Every Textbook Writer Should Know", Educational Leadership April 1985: pp. 4-8. This slant seems to support the arguments of those who would claim that minorities as a whole are enjoying greater prosperity and happiness than at any previous stage of this country's development.

Due to the nature of the textbook-publishing business, there is pressure to please educators from a few powerful states.

Some large states like Texas, California and Florida use the adoption procedures of textbook assignment, whereby committees from those states choose which books the school districts within their state can use. Other states allow their districts to choose what materials they wish to distribute to their students. (Komoski, P.K., "Instruction Materials Will Not Improve Until We Change the System", Educational Leadership, April 1985: pp. 31-7).

The states which are subject to the adoption procedure do have a choice, but can only pick from state-approved lists. These states use different measures by which to make their requests for suitable materials, but they share a sense of accountability to different, and sometimes conflicting, interest groups. As an example, Texas has a state Board of Education textbook committee to which concerned citizens and lobby groups can make demands and protests (Schomburg, C.E., "Texas and Social Studies Texts", Social Education, January 1986, pp. 58-60.).

For publishers, the success of a program (i.e., books and other instructional materials) is critical for continued survival. To deviate from states' wishes is financially unsound for publishers. The publishing houses are staffed by many ex-teachers who have entered the business primarily because they wanted to improve the type of textbook writing they found to be an obstacle in their teaching. These ex-teachers have been frustrated by the realities of the business, which seems to place sales before real improvements (Komoski).

There are a number of small, maverick publishing houses that

sometimes take the risk of putting more of a priority on quality rather than salability. However, their impact is limited by the fact that they cannot afford the types of sales campaigns to state education committees that are carried out by the larger companies (Hawke, S.D. and Davis, J.E., "A Small Publisher's perspective on the Textbook Controversy", Social Education, January 1986: pp.68-9). On top of this is the confusion caused by the different states' rules concerning educators' contacts with the authors and editors who put together textbooks and other learning materials (A. Graham, "Elementary Social Studies Texts: An Author-Editor's Viewpoint", Social Education, January 1986: pp. 54-5).

A standard applied by educators to learning materials in the early 1970's was idea of the readability formula, which forced textbook writers to force their material into short, staccato-like patterns so that all students could supposedly comprehend the books more easily (Graham). What they found was that instead of enhancing development, the formulas actually interfere with it. Instead of a flow of ideas, there is a listing of facts in paragraph form (Roller, C.M., "Overcoming Underwriting and Other Textbook Sins", Social Education, January 1986: pp. 54-5).

In regard to specific instances of bias towards ethnic groups, there is now a great lack of material in economics books about black and Hispanic unemployment as well as an overwhelming reluctance to deal with the issue of illegal immigration. And while there might be positive stereotypes, the majority of social studies books do not deal with the realities of poverty and racism (L. Ellington, "Blacks and Hispanics in High School

Economics Texts", Social Education, January 1986: pp.64-7). In addition, there has been a trend toward avoiding the whole idea of social conflict among ethnic groups in U.S. History textbooks. This trend would seem to have the effect of tearing students between the textbook ideal of cooperation and the real-life existence of discrimination.

So, we can see that there are huge obstacles to developing curriculum materials because of a need to both meet the adoption states' demands and to satisfy the publishing houses' need to turn a profit. Maybe these problems could be addressed by some sort of national mediation board. Exactly how such a board would operate is beyond my own grasp. It would seem, though, that such a board could begin to look at what makes a good text, as well as acting as an intermediary on what are acceptable subjects for publication by national textbook companies. A national board could bring together educators, text writers and members of state textbook committees to find out what material would be most usable for students and teachers, profitable for publishers and acceptable to the various states.